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County's Cessation Program Helps Resident Quit Smoking

John Huff finally quit after 30 years of regular smoking. Huff began smoking during the Vietnam War as an outlet to relax, while the violence of war took the lives of his fellow soldiers. And that is how so many war veterans who never smoked before started. Cigarettes were plenty and supplied by the carton from the government in S&P ration packs.

Smoking cigarettes was "an accepted evil," said Huff. A pack of cigarettes was only \$0.25, so it was a cheap habit to sustain. A surprising number of soldiers also chewed tobacco, according to Huff. Originally from Chicago, Huff had never been exposed to chewing tobacco before. After the war ended, Huff was already addicted to smoking, going through a pack a day and in no rush to quit.

Nobody in John's family smokes. His mother, a retired nurse, has always encouraged him to quit smoking.

When John thought he was ready to quit, he tried on three separate occasions to quit with cessation classes offered by various programs and a number of times on his own. Huff had quit for six months at one point, however these attempts were not successful and he eventually gave in to the cravings.

Huff's doctor at the Mountain Park Health Clinic informed him of the dangers of smoking and encouraged him to quit. Huff went to Phoenix Baptist Hospital and the Department of Veterans Affairs to try their cessation methods, however he was not successful. He later realized that he wasn't quite ready to stop smoking at that time.

Smokers can only quit when they are ready to. Huff was finally inspired to quit smoking by his eight year old son.

"I want to be here long enough to see my son grow up."

The Maricopa County Tobacco Use Prevention Program (MACTUPP) was the third and last program Huff sought out to help him quit smoking. Huff began attending cessation classes in February 2003 at Mountain Park Health Clinic, one of MACTUPP's numerous locations.



Loss of what to do with your hands is a reason people continue smoking. John Huff chose to use stress balls to occupy his hands.

“You have to get into the mindset when you really want to do something,” said Huff of how he was finally ready to quit.

Huff felt the cessation program with MACTUPP was very informative and well planned, which was different from the other programs he had experienced. His cessation specialist, Lydia George, gave reasonable answers to all of his questions. The program’s honesty and support enabled Huff to finally overcome his addiction.

Huff said the most informative device that Lydia used was a CO2 monitor, which measures lung capacity. As a participant smokes fewer cigarettes, the lung capacity increases because less smoke is taken into the lungs. Huff was able to see his improvement as he progressed through the program.

Loss of hand occupation is a common reason why people say they continue to smoke.

“It’s a never-ending battle,” said Huff. “You feel like you have to do something with your hands.”

For that reason, MACTUPP cessation classes offer numerous devices to help participants solve their hand fixation problems. Huff chose to use stress balls to occupy his hands. He still has stress balls around his house in case he has a craving.

Huff found that the combination of medication, nicotine replacement therapy (patch) and support from the class enabled him to finally become smoke free.

“You have to fight fire with fire,” said Huff. With the help of Zyban, an FDA approved prescription drug designed to sustain release, and the patch he was able to gradually quit. He continued to come to class even after completing the program for support.

Huff is still smoke-free thanks to the MACTUPP cessation program. Huff hasn’t smoked for over a year now.

“I don’t think about it now. It’s not something you want to keep track of.”

Editor’s Note To Smoking Story at top of page:

MACTUPP offers free smoking cessation classes throughout the valley where participants learn techniques to help them quit, receive support needed to be successful and also receive 50% off nicotine replacement therapy. For more information, please call 602-372-7272 or visit the Website at www.mactupp.org.